

Social Networking Services

As detailed throughout this report, social networking technologies afford users the chance to interact, share themselves, and create content. Social networking services (SNS), as defined by Wikipedia, are “primarily web based and provide a collection of various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups.”¹ Gene Smith’s building blocks of social sites (see chapter 1)—identity, presence, relationships, conversations, groups, reputation, and sharing—will all be found by users at various SNS.

In the past few years, we’ve seen the rise of sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and other communities online, many centered around topics or interests. (Wikipedia’s list of social networking sites includes 40+ sites to explore.) Through such a service, a user can, for example, create a profile page complete with an image and other personal information; establish connections to online “friends”; and engage in discussions, sharing knowledge or opinions and eliciting feedback. Thriving sites might have hundreds or thousands of users (or millions, in the case of MySpace), who have learned how easy it is to make connections online.

In 2006, this phenomenon was noted in *Newsweek* and *Time* cover stories.² What does it mean in 2007? It means that many people have discovered a way to extend their lives online—to engage with others, to talk, and to get a response. What does it mean for libraries? It means we may want to be present there—findable and ready to discuss or answer questions. This chapter explores how libraries and librarians are using some popular social networking sites, including MySpace, Facebook, and the do-it-yourself site Ning to do just that. Other sites that offer social networking features include the music-focused Last.fm and MySpace rival Bebo.

MySpace

MySpace is one of the most talked about and used social networking sites around. While Facebook gains ground, libraries are still finding ways to make connections via MySpace, which offers profile pages, blogging, instant messaging, favorite friends, embedded music, and much, much more.

Two notable examples among many are the MySpace pages for Hennepin County Public Library (HCPL) and for the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County (PLCMC). Examining both offers insights into what makes a thriving MySpace page for a library.

Hennepin’s page features an embedded Library Search box and the code that the library’s MySpace friends can use to add the search to their own profiles. Rotating images on the page show the faces of various library staff members, adding the human dimension discussed in chapter 3. “The best thing a library can do in any social networking environment is link to as many exciting features on your library website as possible,” stated HCPL’s Meg Canada. “Users who find you here appreciate code that can be copied and reused. Add a catalog search and share how they can do the same. Show them how to add content from your site. At Hennepin County Library, we get over eight hundred hits each week from our MySpace account.”³

PLCMC’s “Library Loft” page features blog posts, an embedded IM window via Meebo Me (see chapter 2), and notes about what teens will find in the physical Library Loft:

Up for a relaxing uptown hang out? Stop by *The Loft at ImaginOn* in uptown Charlotte. You’ll find a space designed to support all your homework help, computer, graphic novel, DVD, CD,

and script wants and needs. Check out the blogs above if you live in the area (or you're in town) and are between 12 & 18 years old. Tech Central even has a state-of-the-art blue screen studio. Blue screen studio??? You heard right, a studio where you can create your very own cartoons, claymations, or live action (you're the actor) movies. We have Acid Music Studio available to spill your own beats and take them with you on a recordable CD.⁴

Jesse Vieau, teen specialist at the PLCMC, told me that the YA staff strives for "best practices" in every aspect of the Teen Services Department. "With both the teen Web site and the MySpace page, the goal is to meet the same basic needs of our virtual patrons as we do with our in-house patrons. We invite participation by encouraging teens to provide us with suggestions and generate content (especially videos), as well as create art and take photos that are then posted on our site."⁵

With regard to best practices, Vieau believes in making sure PLCMC's MySpace site is a safe and developmentally appropriate space for the library's teen friends. "We do this by making sure we only accept friend requests from teens, other libraries or librarians, local youth serving organizations, and YA authors. Finally, we respect our 1100 friends by only posting bulletins about our most important topics and upcoming programs."⁶

Librarian Woody Evans detailed in *Library Journal* how libraries might use MySpace effectively:

First, library profiles in MySpace should be portals to more complete suites of library resources. This isn't to say that no libraries on MySpace keep good practices. But of all the library profiles I've seen, perhaps a half-dozen are really doing good things for users. We can do better. Are you with a college library? Then push information relevant to the courses offered on your campus. Are you with a public library? Why not push blogs that evaluate for parents manga and

anime? Why not use your profiles to link to your database pages and your catalog?⁷

Facebook

It really is where our users are: the Colorado College network has close to 3,500 people (for a campus with ~ 2,000 current students). The group for the class of incoming students already has 354 members two months before school starts.

Steve Lawson, "Facebook to Library Apps: Drop Dead," See Also blog, July 3, 2007, <http://stevlawson.name/seealso>

Facebook is another SNS, which features many of the same affordances as MySpace but in a cleaner and more user-friendly space. Facebook started as a site strictly for college students. A user had to provide a .edu e-mail address to even get an account. Lately, Facebook has received a lot of attention since it opened the social network beyond colleges and universities and launched Facebook applications in spring 2007.

Ben Gold at Mashable.com wrote about the differences and similarities between the two popular social networking sites. He focuses on five areas of evaluation: design, media, community, usefulness, and ease of use. The design section can teach us a lot about what might go into our library Web presence in a 2.0 world:

Layout: Facebook wins here because the profiles are well set up and neatly organized and it's easy to navigate through the profiles to find the info you want. It mainly beats MySpace because most profiles are so ugly and inconsistent.

Overall Site Design: Facebook is obviously the winner here. MySpace looks so unprofessionally done when compared to Facebook, mainly again because of its inconsistent design. This time its

Are you teaching MySpace? How are you teaching MySpace?

Matt Gullett, emerging technology manager for the ImagineOn at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, wrote a thoughtful post about making connections in library MySpace classes:

On another occasion I had four moms from the same bible study. They were all very interested and engaged. In fact, the workshop lasted a full 2 hours. It is only suppose to go an hour. In the process of all that went on that evening we looked up one of the mother's daughter's MySpace page, and the mother had never seen it before. I was a bit nervous about doing that, but her daughter's, who is a freshman/sophomore in college, page looked fine.

It had nothing really shocking or out of the ordinary for a typical young adult in their late teens/early twenties. It also allowed us the opportunity to go over how to search for their child's MySpace page. (Matt Gullett, "MySpace for Parents Pt. 2 . . .," Youth Tech, Oct. 15, 2006, <http://youthtech.wordpress.com/2006/10/15/myspace-for-parents-pt-2>)

MySpace themselves, not the users, who make the site difficult to use.

Profiles: This is a tie because MySpace has a lot of customization, but Facebook's default looks better than MySpace's and it's very neat and well organized.

Customization: MySpace and Facebook tie here. While Facebook lets you add and remove applications, MySpace lets you do whatever you want with the pages, if you know a little HTML that is. Unfortunately that's the reason MySpace's design is so unruly for the most part.

Site Organization: Both site are pretty well organized. However, Facebook wins because of its clean layout that allows you to find everything right away, and it's start page is a link to everything you need in neat and tidy boxes.⁸

In the community section, Gold compares MySpace and Facebook on other valuable affordances of social networking sites, with Facebook coming out on top almost every time:

Relationships: A big difference on Facebook is that the friends you add are usually your real friends. It's not a contest like on MySpace where everyone is trying to have the most friends. On Facebook it about talking to the people you know and sharing things with them.

Groups: Both sites have groups, but Facebook makes them more prominent. They are a bigger part of the service and there are a lot of people using them for clever uses like planning meet up and giving info to fans.

Keeping Track of What's New: Facebook kills MySpace here. On MySpace the only way to know if a friend added something new to their profile is to go look at it, and the only way to know if you made a new friends is to look for the person. Facebook has two feeds. One tells you what's new with you, like who accepted your friend request or your posted items, etc. The other feed tells you what's up with all your friends, like who they added and what groups they joined.

Messaging: This is a tie. They both have a place where people can leave messages on your profile and they both have a basic mail system.

Co-Workers: Facebook can be used as a tool to talk to the people you work with also and see what's new with them. You can even join a

network for your company. MySpace was really designed for teens so it doesn't really have these types of features.⁹

What might we take away from an article such as Gold's—and from exploring and using the social networking sites? Design principles for sure, but also some clues as to what features users may want in an online social space: alerts, messaging, relationships. Note the Facebook features that encourage coworkers to interact, create their own Facebook network, and see what's new with others. Your library could create a Facebook network, and any interested staff member could join for interaction, "friending," and current awareness.

At colleges and universities, Facebook offers students a similar way to make connections and meet and greet. Libraries and librarians are adding their presence here, too. Robert J. Lackie, associate professor/librarian at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, posted at the LibraryGarden blog about his use of Facebook:

As a librarian and professor, I joined Facebook last year when I found out that the students in my public speaking class were communicating with each other via that tool, instead of our university's email system. It was amazing how much more open and willing the students were to sharing information about each other and their individual and group projects in our class, via Facebook. They were thrilled that I was willing to join Facebook, and they loved that I used it to find out and celebrate their birthdays, for instance, as they came up during the semester.¹⁰

Librarians & Facebook

"Going where the users are" is a phrase we've seen a lot in discussions about Web 2.0. Exploring librarian and library presence in Facebook yields many personal pages of library staff members and more than a handful of groups devoted to specific libraries and library interests. A movement to create Facebook profiles for libraries, in the same way that libraries create profiles in MySpace, was derailed in September 2006 as Facebook began shutting down those pages, citing a prohibition on organizational profiles. Librarian Stacey Greenwell at the University of Kentucky Library blogged about her interactions with Facebook when they shut down her library's profile and included her e-mail replies to the site administrators:

We would also like to register a complaint about this policy. First, we do not believe that your Terms prohibit organizational profiles. The

terms do specify, “personal, non-commercial use only”, but we believe that our profile satisfies this requirement. We represent the University of Kentucky Library—the profile represents actual humans, and we make no attempt to disguise our identities. We provide contact information and have created additional separate profiles for several of the librarians who contribute to the main Library profile. We’re not selling anything. Please send us the specific section of the terms that you believe we have violated.¹¹

Now libraries use groups on Facebook, and librarians use their own profile pages for outreach and presence. Brian Mathews at Georgia Tech describes his use of Facebook with a group of incoming freshmen at his blog *The Ubiquitous Librarian*.¹² Mathews uploaded images of the library and “started posting answers or responding directly to individuals on topics such as safety on campus and around Atlanta, laptop computer requirements, places to eat, the music scene, trolley and subway transportation, weather, and freshmen orientation sessions” inside the message boards. “Students just have lots of questions,” he said. “It’s like they are entering into a new country, a new culture—librarians can help bridge that gap—they have all these questions, and using social network to communicate.”

Others have not had the success described by Mathews and McMaster University Librarian Jeff Trzeciak, but Mathews urges librarians to engage in the subtle art of conversation. He notes:

This type of outreach enables us to position ourselves as an open, friendly, welcoming service environment. We’re Disneyland compared with the stress of financial aid, registration, and housing. (Free printing, café, fantastic air conditioning, comfortable couches, lots of computers, cool software, cool equipment.)¹³

I’ve actually met quite a bit with various students on campus. In fact, I have a meeting with the President of the MSU (McMaster Student Union) next week. I’ve done quite a bit to encourage the students to talk to me and include me in their conversations about campus. I am in Facebook and have been added as “Friend” by the outgoing MSU President, the incoming President, the President of our part time student group and one of the VP’s for the MSU. The blog and Facebook are just a couple of ways that I try to reach students—by engaging them WHERE THEY ARE—not just where we are. I actually find Facebook a better way of talking to them. I think that my efforts to reach students through Facebook are paying off more than my blog.

Just this morning I logged into Facebook to see that a student at Mac commented on one of our job openings. Granted, the job opening was posted on my blog (and my blog is integrated with my Facebook) also granted, the comment was intended to be funny. But, the fact is, the student saw the post and took the time to comment. That to me says they are paying attention to what goes into my Facebook and feel comfortable enough to write on my wall! Not bad, eh? I don’t think the student would have taken time to either read my blog directly OR subscribe to it. But, he did take the time to look at it in Facebook.

Jeff Trzeciak, University Librarian, McMaster University, e-mail interview by the author, July 7, 2007

With the launch of Facebook applications, libraries found a way to include search boxes and other widgets to establish presence inside of the site. As this report was going to press, it was reported that Facebook was discourag-

Facebook Librarian

In an e-mail, Mathews described further for me his interactions with students on Facebook:

Students asked each other questions and I would post answers along with others, so it’s me being part of the community.

One guy asked about grills on campus because he likes to BBQ. I told him about grills near volleyball courts and the BBQ Club. Then we got to talking about food plans and boxing . . . he’s a boxer.

Another guy was asking about safety and security in Atlanta . . . so I gave him my thoughts on that—he responded asking about jobs in the library.

Someone asked about printing on campus—I told them how it works in the library.

Someone asked about the music scene—so I told them about bars and venues near campus, as well student organization that brings in local and regional bands.

Someone asked about what type of computer and software they should bring.

Lots of questions about dorms, housing, majors, and simply campus life.

My objective is to provide an encounter/make an impression before students arrive the first week and feel stressed out. (Brian Mathews, e-mail message to the author, July 8, 2007)

ing libraries from creating applications that searched the Web, but discussions of catalog searches were ongoing.¹⁴

Ning

Ning is social networking service that allows anyone to build their own SNS site via a set of integrated Web tools. Features include the creation of groups, discussion forums, integrated blogs, RSS feeds, tag clouds, integrated video and photos, and personal page customization. The site FAQ states:

Ning is a platform for creating your own social networks. Our passion is putting new social networks in the hands of anyone with a good idea. With Ning, your social network can be anything and for anyone. You start by choosing a combination of features (videos, blogs, photos, forums, etc.) from an ever-growing list of options. Then customize how it looks, decide if it's public or private, add your brand logo if you have one, and enable the people on your network to create their own custom personal profile pages.¹⁵

Ning has caught on with Internet users. Ning cofounder Gina Bianchini posted to Ning Blog on July 12, 2007, that Ning was hosting over 75,500 social networks.¹⁶ Networks at Ning range from communities centered around popular culture and music to networks for professionals to discuss their respective fields.

To see Ning in action, visit Library 2.0, the thriving Ning site created by Morrisville State College Libraries librarian Bill Drew (see figure 13). Within weeks of the launch, librarians from all over the world had joined and started conversations. Drew is pleased with the result. "The biggest benefit of creating L2 on Ning to me personally has been one of enjoyment, surprise, and satisfaction at how it has grown into a self sustaining community," he told me. "It demonstrates to the library community and beyond the strengths of building an online community using Web 2.0 tools. I am still experimenting with new features and technologies on L2 including such things as YackPack and other tech goodies. I also learn something new almost every day from the forums and blog posts."¹⁷

Interested readers might check out Ning or the L2 Ning, or create their own network. Other thriving library-related Nings include the American Library Association Ning and a Ning for Librarian Bloggers.



Figure 13
Discussion forums at the Library 2.0 Ning.

Hennepin County Library's BookSpace

In early 2007, Hennepin County Library debuted BookSpace (see figure 14), a home-grown reading community that features some social aspects for the library's patrons. Lynn Blumenstein reported in *Library Journal*:

A "My bookspace" area invites visitors to register for the opportunity to create book lists, sign up for author alerts, and contribute comments. The site offers more than 100 book club kits, including eight to ten copies of a title and a reading group guide, for checkout—an offering funded by the library's foundation. Users can peruse both EBSCO's NoveList readers' advisory database and HCL's own "If you like" product.¹⁸

The site also features a blog with RSS feeds. It's a fitting mashup of social networking sites and what libraries do so well.

What You Can Do Now

Here are some steps you can take now to begin using the ideas in this chapter:

- Investigate some library MySpace profiles and create one for your library. Follow the lead of HCPL

and PLCMC and create an extension of your library in users' space.

- Create a Facebook page for yourself. Add as much personal information as you'd like. Find colleagues to "friend." Try some of the applications and features. Then, follow the advice of librarians like Brian Mathews and engage your users in a conversation.
- Create a Ning social network for your library staff (or department, branch, agency, etc) and explore the features of a do-it-yourself SNS. Create groups for your library teams. Manage projects and communication channels for library-wide initiatives.
- Create a Ning site for your library users, such as a readers' community, homework or coursework help site, or technology support clearinghouse. Promote it. Invite participation.

Resources

ALA Ning

<http://alamembers.ning.com>

Bebo

www.bebo.com

Hennepin County Library's BookSpace

www.hclib.org/pub/bookspace

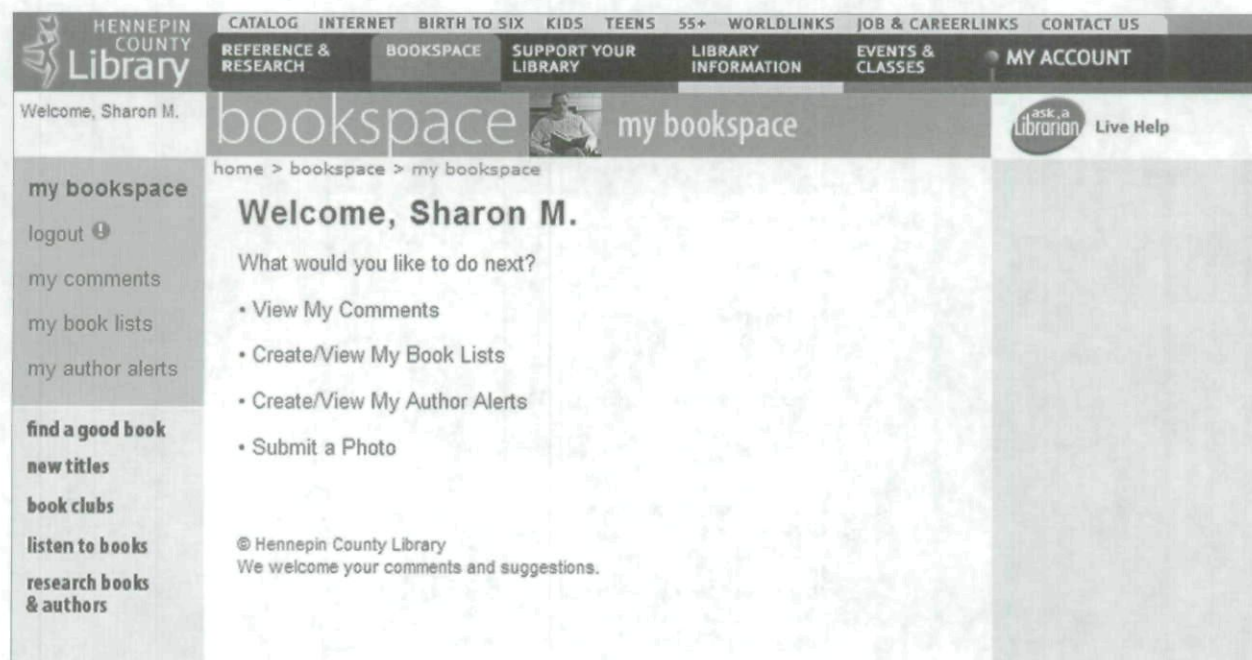


Figure 14

Personalized "My bookspace" page on Hennepin County Library's BookSpace.

Hennepin County Library's Extranet: BookSpace
<http://www.hclib.org/extranet/News/bookspace.cfm>

Hennepin County Library's MySpace
www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary

Last.fm
www.lastfm.com

Library Facebook Profile Shut Down
http://sla-divisions.typepad.com/tbloggingsection/2006/09/librarys_facebo.htm

Library 2.0 Ning
<http://library20.ning.com>

Ning
www.ning.com

Ning for Librarian Bloggers
<http://librarianbloggers.ning.com>

PLCMC's Library Loft
www.libraryloft.org

PLCMC's MySpace Page
www.myspace.com/libraryloft

Wikipedia's List of Social Networking Sites
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websitesResources

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10. Robert J. Lackie, "MySpace and Social Networking Sites," *Library Garden*, April 11, 2006, <http://librarygarden.blogspot.com/2006/04/myspace-and-social-networking-sites.html> (accessed July 11, 2007).
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13. Ibid.
14. For more on this issue, see Steve Lawson, "Facebook to Library Apps: Drop Dead," See Also blog, July 3, 2007, <http://stevlawson.name/seealso> (accessed July 11, 2007).
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Notes

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6. Ibid.
7. Woody Evans, "My MySpace Comment," *Library Journal*, Feb. 15, 2007, available online at www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6413453.html (accessed July 11, 2007).
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